REMARKS

ON

President Edwards's Dissertations concerning the Nature of true Virtue:

Shewing that he has given a wrong Idea, and Definition of Virtue, and is inconsistent with himself.

TO WHICH IS ADDED,

AN ATTEMPT to shew wherein true VIRTUE does consist.

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Great Men are not always wise. ELIHU.

Beware lest any Man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ. PAUL.

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PREFACE.

DUE reſpect to great and good men, is doubtleſs conſiſtent with ſupreme regard to truth. The late Reverend Preſident Edwards, is remembered with great honor; but we ought not to be biaſed in our judgment by partial favour. God accepteth no man's perſon. If his ſentiments upon the ſubject before us were wrong, (as I believe they will appear to be) he does not now approve them, and would be well pleaſed to know they are diſapproved, ſo far as they are ſo, by his brethren dwelling in the fleſh, and that right ſentiments prevail. I have therefore no apprehenſion of giving offence to him, or his companions, the ſpirits of juſt men made perfect, by the preſent attempt, to ſerve the intereſt of truth and virtue, by expoſing the falſhood of his peculiar notions. For I have no ſiniſter views in this buſineſs.

If what I have wrote in the following pages is ſuch, as to commend itſelf to the acceptance of the wiſe and impartial, I am ſatisfied, and can patiently endure the unjuſt cenſures of the unwiſe.—If any of the ſons of truth and virtue read the following piece, I hope they will judge and treat it according to truth; and the writer as they would reaſonably deſire to be treated themſelves. He aſks no more.

I have aimed to tranſcribe enough to give the reader a true idea of the author's doctrine. If I have failed of this in any particular, it is without deſign.

BRITISH MUSEUM

REMARKS, &c.

CHAP. I.

Of Mr. Edwards's notion of the eſſence or root of true virtue.

MR. EDWARDS in his firſt chapter gives us his idea of the eſſence and root of all true virtue. By virtue he tells us he means true holineſs or grace. This he calls the true, moral beauty of all moral beings. He ſays 'True virtue *moſt eſſentially* conſiſts in benevolence to 'being in general.' * By being in general, he tells us he means 'intelligent beings in general, not inanimate be-'ings that have no perception or will.—True virtue 'primarily conſiſts, not in love to any particular beings 'becauſe of their virtue or beauty; nor in gratitude, 'becauſe they love us,' (therefore not in love to God as a being of infinite moral excellence, and love) 'but a 'propenſity and union of heart to being, *ſimply conſidered*, 'exciting *abſolute* benevolence to being *in general*.——I 'would expreſs what appears to me to be the truth on 'this ſubject, in the following particulars.

'The *firſt* object of a virtuous benevolence is *being*, '*ſimply* conſidered: And if being ſimply conſidered, be 'its object, then being *in general* is its object.

'The ſecond object of a virtuous propenſity of heart, 'is *benevolent* being.—A ſecondary ground of *pure* be-'nevolence, is virtuous benevolence itſelf, in its object. 'When any one under the influence of general benevo-'lence, ſees another being poſſeſs'd of the like general 'benevolence, this attaches his heart to him, and draws 'forth greater love to him, than merely his having ex-'iſtence.

* P. 117.

'iſtence——as it were out of gratitude to him for his 'love of general exiſtence.

'Several things noted--concerning this ſecondary 'ground of a truly virtuous love. Firſt, That loving a 'being on *this ground*' (as God for inſtance) '*neceſſarily* 'ariſes *from* pure benevolence to being *in general*, and '*comes to the ſame thing*.

'2. This which has been mentioned as a ſecondary 'ground of virtuous love, is the thing wherein *true, mo-*'*ral*, or ſpiritual *beauty primarily* conſiſts. Yea ſpiritual 'beauty conſiſts *wholly in this*, and the various qualities 'and exerciſes of mind, which *proceed from it*; and the 'external actions which proceed from theſe. And in 'theſe things conſiſts *all true virtue*.

'3. As all ſpiritual beauty lies in theſe principles and 'acts, ſo 'tis *primarily on this account*, they are beautiful, 'viz. that they *imply conſent* and *union*, with being *in* '*general*. This is the *primary* and moſt *eſſential* beauty 'of every thing that can juſtly be called by the name 'virtue, or is any moral excellency.

'4. This ſpiritual beauty, that is but a *ſecondary* ground 'of a virtuous benevolence, is the *primary* ground of a 'truly virtuous *complacence*.' ‡

Let us ſtop here a little, and make a few reflections on the doctrine before us.---The primary object of virtuous regard in pure benevolence, which true virtue or holineſs does *radically* and *moſt eſſentially* conſiſt, is being, *ſimply conſidered*, or regarded only as having perception and will, or intelligent being *in general*, abſtractly conſidered. This primary object of virtuous regard, conſidered as ſuch, has no perſonal, or moral, or relative characters. It has but two attributes, perception and will. It is neither wiſe nor fooliſh, neither morally good nor evil, neither ſelf-exiſtent nor created and dependent, neither God nor a creature. It has no relation to the benevolent mind. It is mental being in general, *ſimply conſidered, as ſuch*. The virtuous mind viewing of it *as ſuch*, unclothed

‡ p. 21—24.

unclothed with any other characters, perſonal or relative, wiſhes away in the dark, that it may enjoy all the perfection, honor and happineſs it is capable of, be it what it will. 'All true virtue conſiſts moſt eſſentially 'in this general benevolence; yea, it conſiſts wholly 'in this, and in thoſe mental affections and actions 'which ariſe out of it.' Does it ſo indeed? Is this the *root*, out of which love to God, and all particular moral beings ſprings? Are all particular virtues branches which ſpring from this root? May all theſe be reſolved into this pure or ſimple benevolence to being ſimply conſidered, as their firſt principle? It muſt be ſo, according to the doctrine before us. How different is this from that divine philoſophy taught us from heaven!

According to this fundamental principle of Mr. Edwards's ſcheme, God is not the primary object of virtuous regard, nor is love to him the root of virtuous affections. For God, and being ſimply conſidered, are exceeding divers from each other. Our author indeed ſometimes ſays, they are the ſame, in effect, and that benevolence to the one is, in effect, the ſame as love to the other. But in this he is totally inconſiſtent with himſelf, and confounds his own fundamental doctrine. Of the love of complacence which ariſes out of benevolence to being, ſimply conſidered, God may be the primary and chief object, conſiſtently with this ſcheme; but of the love of virtuous benevolence he is, and can be but a ſecondary object. Benevolence to God, a particular being, is but a ſecondary virtue, or particular great branch of benevolence to being, ſimply conſidered. For 'true virtue primarily conſiſts not in love to any 'particular beings *as virtuous*' (ſo not to God) 'but in a 'propenſity and union of heart to being, ſimply conſi-'dered, exciting abſolute benevolence to being in ge-'neral.'

According to this doctrine, there ought to have been *three* great commands. The firſt, greateſt, and moſt fundamental of all ſhould have been this, viz. 'Thou

'ſhalt

'shalt love being in general, simply considered as having 'perception and will: for simple benevolence to this is 'the root and mother of all particular virtues; and all 'moral excellence and spiritual beauty primarily and 'most essentially consists in it.'---Secondly, 'Subordi-'nate to this, and as the first great branch of this root, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart. 'And thirdly, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.' But on the two last 'hang all the law and the pro-'phets.' The first is wholly overlooked. A strange oversight, if all true virtue, or holiness and grace, primarily, radically, and most essentially consists in it!

Some gentlemen, perhaps, unwilling to give up Mr. Edwards's doctrine, will say, 'These two commands imply, the first, as containing the whole of mental being.' This is no answer to the objection. According to this notion of the root, or first principle of true virtue, love to God, as well as to our neighbour, is the offspring of this general, indeterminate benevolence. And if it is fit to command or require the daughter affection, much more the mother love. And besides, Jesus Christ says, to love the Lord our God, is the *first* and *greatest* command in the law. He has given no intimation of his knowing any thing of this hidden root, and spring of all virtue. And the holy prophets and apostles knew nothing of it.

CHAP. II.

How supreme love to God results from absolute benevolence to being, simply considered, and is in effect the same thing.

MR. Edwards begins his second chapter thus, 'From 'what has been said, 'tis evident, that true vir-'tue must chiefly consist in love to God.---This ap-'pears whether we consider the primary or secondary 'ground of virtuous love.

1st. 'It was observed that the *first* objective ground of

' of that love wherein true virtue conſiſts, is being ſimp-
' ly conſidered; and as a neceſſary conſequence of this,
' that being who has the moſt of being, has proportion-
' ably the greateſt ſhare of virtuous benevolence,' being known as ſuch. ' But God has infinitely the greateſt ' ſhare of exiſtence, or is infinitely the greateſt being. ' So that all other beings---is as nothing in compariſon ' of him.' According to our author, ' True virtue pri-
' marily and moſt eſſentially conſiſts in pure benevo-
' lence to being in general: Yea it wholly conſiſts in
' this and thoſe affections and actions that ariſe out of
' it.' If ſo, virtue muſt *chiefly* conſiſt in love to being in general. And this general benevolence muſt, in the order of nature, at leaſt, be conceived of, as antecedent to any truly virtuous regard to any particular being whatever: for ſuch are regarded with benevolence, *primarily*, as having a ſhare in general being.

Upon Mr. Edwards's principles the abſolutely great Being, muſt have an incomparably greater ſhare of the primary benevolence to being, ſimply conſidered, than all other particular beings. Compared with them he has chief and ſupreme benevolent regard: but not ſo, compared with the primary object of virtuous love, viz. Being in general. That muſt be the chief object; for the great Being does not exhauſt all being, ſo as to reduce all others to non-exiſtence, or no degree of being. He infinitely outweighs all other beings, as put into the ſcale againſt him. But if his infinite degree of being is put into one ſcale, and the ſame be put into the oppoſite ſcale, and together with that the degrees of exiſtence of all other beings, 'tis obvious this great Being's weight in the oppoſite ſcales will balance itſelf, and the whole weight of the other beings will remain clear, and turn the ſcale. This ſcale has in it the whole of the primary object of virtuous love, the other not; and the virtuous attraction, or tendency of primary benevolence to being ſimply conſidered, is in proportion to the quantity of being.---How do falſe metaphiſicks entangle and miſlead

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the greateſt and beſt men, when they wander in them? It is as dengerous a thing to attempt to be wiſe overmuch, as to be overmuch righteous.

But let us attend to the *ſecond* thing mentioned by our author, as an evidence that true virtue does, upon his firſt principle, conſiſt *chiefly* in love to God. 'If we 'conſider the *ſecondary* ground of love, viz. Beauty or 'moral excellency, the ſame thing will appear,' viz. That virtue chiefly conſiſts in the love of God: 'for God 'is infinitely the moſt beautiful and excellent being, as 'well as the greateſt. Therefore he that has true vir'tue conſiſting' (primarily, radically and moſt eſſentially) 'in benevolence to being in general, and' (ſecondarily) 'in complacence in virtue, and benevolence to 'virtuous being, muſt neceſſarily have a ſupreme love 'to God, both of benevolence and complacence.' ‖ Our author ſays, as quoted above, 'a *ſecondary* ground of 'pure benevolence is virtuous benevolence it ſelf, in its 'object.---And loving a being on *this ground*, neceſſari'ly *ariſes from* pure benevolence to being in general & 'comes to *the ſame thing*.' From theſe principles it neceſſarily follows, that love to God, both of benevolence and complacence, conſidered as having infinitely the higheſt benevolence to being ſimply conſidered, is but a *ſecondary* and *daughter* virtue. The mother virtue is demonſtrably no other than pure benevolence to being ſimply conſidered. God, as moſt benevolent to being in general, is the firſt object of virtue's *ſecondary* love: Being ſimply conſidered, has the firſt and ſupreme regard. For it can't be that the daughter love, ſhould uſurp the place and honor of the mother, or that the ſtream ſhould be prefered before, and be greater than the fountain.

Indeed God is, upon theſe principles, the chief and ſupreme object of virtuous *complacence*. But ſuch complacence is itſelf the offſpring of benevolence to being ſimply conſidered, and may be reſolved into it. 'He 'that

‖ p. 126.

'that is governed by love to being in general, muſt of 'neceſſity have complacence in him, who he ſees has 'the ſame benevolence, and the greater degree of bene-'volence to him, as it were *out of gratitude* to him, for 'his love to general exiſtence, that his own heart is unit-'ed to, and ſo looks on its intereſt as its own.' ‡

Can theſe things be right? Is true, religious love to God ſuch as Mr. Edwards here repreſents it? Does the virtuous or holy mind firſt entertain a benevolent affection for being in general, abſtractly conſidered, ſimply as intelligent, and in the next ſtep direct this benevolence chiefly to God, conſidering him as having the greateſt ſhare of mental being? and thus viewing him as moſt benevolent and beneficent to being ſimply conſidered, does the benevolent mind riſe in greater benevolence to him, and ſettle in complacence in him, on this account, from a ſort of gratitude to him, as thus befriending the grand object of his primary love? Does not this repreſent being ſimply conſidered as the ſupreme object of virtuous regard, and make it an idol, and virtue itſelf idolatrous? Does it not in effect repreſent love to God, as the reſult of our own virtuous love to ſimple being, virtue's idol, rather than of his virtuous attraction, and quickening love to us while we were ſinners? Do we receive any ſuch ideas from inſpired teachers in holy ſcripture?---Theſe views are too ſhocking. Mr. Edwards could not admit them in open light, tho' his doctrine leads to them; but often turns off his eye, & relieves both himſelf and his reader, by giving a truer view of love to God. I wiſh he had been uniform in this: But he is very inconſiſtent with himſelf. I believe it is not poſſible for ſo great and good a man as he was, building on ſo falſe a foundation, to be ſelf-conſiſtent throughout.--He ſays, '*All true virtue* muſt *radically*, and '*eſſentially* conſiſt in a ſupreme love to God, both of

 benevolence

‡ p. 123.

'*benevolence* and complacence.' † And yet he lays it down as his fundamental principle, 'that true virtue '*moſt* eſſentially conſiſts in benevolence to being in ge-'neral; the firſt object of a virtuous benevolence, or of 'virtuous love is being *ſimply* conſidered.' Being *in general*, or *ſimply* conſidered is not God: It has none of the peculiar, diſtinguiſhing characters of the Godhead. 'Tis impoſſible that virtue ſhould primarily, radically & moſt eſſentially conſiſt both in love to God, and to being ſimply conſidered, unleſs it may thus conſiſt in love to two very different objects, God, and a mere abſtract idea, a creature of the mind. Our worthy author alſo ſays, 'Being in general—is by right the great, ſupreme, rul-'ing and abſolutely ſovereign object of our regard.' (p. 30.) This is not God. He is one only, and diſtinguiſhed from all other beings in the univerſe, who are almoſt infinite in number and weight. But he ſoon comes about right again, and ſays, 'A truly virtuous 'mind is under the ſovereign dominion of love to God. (p. 133)—'It may be aſſerted in general, that nothing is 'of the nature of *true* virtue, in which God is not the *firſt*

† I here preſent the reader with a remark of an ingenious Gentleman, in a letter to me, which I think is very juſt. 'Mr. Edwards's 'unuſual, improper manner of uſing the word *benevolence* is worthy, 'I ſhould think, of being particularly noticed. To ſay a ſubject, a 'peaſant, a poor beggar ſhould exerciſe benevolence towards his Prince, 'that a child ſhould be benevolent to his father, &c. ſounds very 'odd; but to denominate that regard which an intelligent creature 'owes to that Being, who poſſeſſes independently an inexhauſtable 'fullneſs, and who is the creator and father of all living, to deno-'minate the regard we owe to this Being, *benevolence*, is more than 'odd; it is quite improper, and ſounds irreverent. Nor will it ſuf-'fice to ſay (as Mr. Edwards's admirers have ſaid) that a man may 'uſe any word he pleaſes, provided he aſcertains the ſenſe in which 'he uſes it: For by that rule the moſt familiar or vulgar, yea, and 'profane expreſſions might be uſed concerning the bleſſed God, with 'innocence.'—I think Mr. Edwards has greatly debaſed the idea & character of that reverent love we owe to the great God, in his account of the root and progreſs of love to him, as above. In truth he has changed the nature of virtue and piety, as will more fully appear in the ſequal.

'*first* and the laſt; or which, with regard to their exercises in general, have not their *firſt foundation* and '*ſource* in apprehenſions of God's ſupreme dignity and 'glory, and in anſwerable eſteem and love to him, and 'have not reſpect to God as their ſupreme end.'(p. 134.)

This is moſt true. And yet it is ſaid, 'true virtue 'primarily conſiſts not in love to any particular beings, 'becauſe of their virtue,---but in propenſity and union 'of heart, to being *ſimply* conſidered.

Let us carefully gather up the ſcattered wheat, and let the wind drive the chaff away.

Mr. Edwards preſents us with three grand objects of virtue's primary and moſt eſſential regard, viz. Being in general, conſidered ſimply, as intelligent, uncloathed with any perſonal, moral or relative characters; the univerſal ſyſtem of intelligent beings, and God the author of being, and head of the ſyſtem; and ſays, theſe are in effect one: and primary and chief regard to being in general, ſimply conſidered, to the univerſal ſyſtem of beings, and to God the Being of beings, and head of the ſyſtem, is repreſented as, in effect, the ſame thing. But each of theſe objects has peculiar characters, which give ground for diſtinguiſhing ideas: Our author does often diſtinguiſh them from each other, and they ought never to be confounded. There can't be three *firſt* and *ſupreme* objects of virtuous love.

There is indeed a ſtrange confuſion and inconſiſtence in this great man's ideas and reaſonings upon this ſubject. And it muſt neceſſarily be ſo whenever men attempt to blend true and falſe principles together. Therefore it is ſaid in the law, 'Thou ſhalt not wear a gar-'ment of divers ſorts. Thou ſhalt not plow with an ox 'and an aſs together. Thou ſhalt not ſow thy vineyard 'with divers ſeeds; leſt the fruit of thy ſeed which thou 'haſt ſown, and the fruit of thine vineyard be *defiled*. *

Suffer me juſt to mention one thing more. Our author ſays, 'The virtue of the divine Mind, muſt conſiſt

'*primarily*

* Deut. 24. 9, 10, 11.

'*primarily* in love to himſelf.--There is no need of multiplying words to prove that it muſt be thus on a ſuppoſition that virtue, in its moſt eſſential nature, conſiſt in benevolent affection or propenſity of heart towards being in general; and ſo flowing out to particular beings in a greater or leſſer degree, according to the meaſure of exiſtence and beauty' (benevolence to being ſimply conſidered) 'which they are poſſeſſed of.'‡ He alſo ſays elſewhere, 'God's own holineſs muſt primarily conſiſt in love to himſelf.' * According to this notion all other divine virtues, or moral excellencies of the Divine Mind, ſuch as love of juſtice, equity or moral proportion, faithfulneſs, &c. are only ſecondary virtues, which ariſe out of pure benevolence to being ſimply conſidered, and derive all their virtuouſneſs or moral excellence and beauty from their ſubordination and ſubſerviency to it; as will more fully appear in the next chapter. But it is doubtleſs more natural and juſt to conſider all moral virtues or perfections in the Divine Being as equally original and primary, and virtuous and beautiful, in themſelves ſimply conſidered. All theſe moral attributes of the divine Mind, ſeen by the divine eye, together with thoſe that are called natural, God is worthily the primary and chief object of his own virtuous or holy love. He is not virtuous and holy becauſe he loves himſelf, but he loves himſelf becauſe he is holy.

CHAP. III.

Concerning Mr. Edwards's notions of the primary and ſecondary beauty of moral things.

MR. Edwards, in his third chapter, ſays many things concerning what he calls the *primary* and *ſecondary* beauty of moral beings and actions, which are very extraordinary, and I think, very injurous and deſtructive to true virtue.---I muſt make ſome extracts that the reader may be under advantage to judge of the juſtneſs of the remarks.

'Tho'

‡ p. 131, 132. * p. 42.

'Tho' that which has been ſpoken of,' viz. benevolence to being ſimply conſidered, &c. '*alone* is juſtly 'eſteemed the true beauty of moral agents,---and *alone* 'is the moral amiableneſs of beings that have underſtanding and will, in the eyes of him that perfectly 'ſees all things as they are: Yet there are other qualities, ſenſations, propenſities and affections of mind, & 'principles of action, that often obtain the epithet of '*virtuous*, and by many are ſuppoſed to have the nature 'of true virtue; which are intirely of a diſtinct nature 'from this, and have nothing of that kind. (p. 134.)

'The propenſity of minds to mental exiſtence may be 'called the *higheſt* and *firſt*, or primary beauty, being 'the proper and peculiar beauty of moral beings.--Yet 'there is another, *inferior*, *ſecondary* beauty, which is not 'peculiar to ſpiritual beings, but is found even in inanimate things; which conſiſts in a mutual conſent 'and agreement of different things in form, manner, 'quantity, and viſible end and deſign; called by the 'various names of regularity, order, uniformity, ſymetry, proportion, harmony, &c. ſuch is the mutual agreement of the ſides of a ſquare—of the colours, figures, dimenſions and diſtances of the different ſpots 'on a cheſs-board—of the figures of a piece of chints, 'or brocade. Such is the beautiful proportion of the 'various parts of a human countenance. And ſuch is 'the ſweet mutual conſent and agreement of the various notes of a melodious tune.

'This ſecondary beauty, conſiſting in uniformity & 'proportion, not only takes place in material things, but 'in things *immaterial*.---This is evident in fact in numberleſs inſtances.——

'There is a beauty in the virtue called *juſtice*, which 'conſiſts in the agreement of different things that have 'relation to one another, in nature, manner, and meaſure: And therefore is the *very ſame ſort* of beauty 'with that uniformity and proportion, which is obſerv-

'able

'able in thoſe *material* things which are eſteemed beau-
'tiful;' (with that of a *cheſs-board* for inſtance.)

'Things are in natural regularity and mutual agree-
'ment, when he whoſe heart oppoſes the univerſal ſyſ-
'tem ſhould have,' (has) 'the hearts of the ſyſtem or---
'of the head of the ſyſtem againſt him, and that in con-
'ſequence he ſhould' (does) 'receive evil in proportion
'to the evil tendency of the oppoſition of his heart.—
'So there is a like agreement in nature and meaſure
'when he that loves has the proper returns of love :---
'as there is a kind of juſtice in a becoming gratitude.

'Indeed moſt of the duties incumbent on us, partake
'of the nature of juſtice. There is ſome natural agree-
'ment of one thing to another; ſome adaptedneſs of
'the agent to the object; ſome anſwerableneſs of the
'act to the occaſion; ſome equality and proportion in
'things of a ſimilar nature and direct relation one to
'another.' (Or, to ſpeak more properly and intelligi-
bly; from the various characters, relations and con-
nections of moral beings, there ariſes a natural and *moral* fitneſs, ſuitableneſs and equity in ſome diſpoſitions, af-
fections and actions of one towards another, and a like unfitneſs, unſuitableneſs, and inequitableneſs in others. But this, tho' the cleareſt and juſteſt manner of expreſſ-
ing the matter, does not ſo well agree with the favorite ſcheme of reducing all moral fitneſſes of relative virtues into the order of *ſecondary* beauties, and of repreſenting their beauty as altogether of the *ſame ſort* with that of a beautiful face, and ſo as having nothing of the *nature* of *true* virtue in them ſimply *as ſuch*; and therefore this is carefully avoided, and ſuch a manner of expreſſion is choſen, as is more applicable to the beautiful harmony of parts in material things. But to return, our author adds) 'ſo it is in relative duties: duties of children to
'parents, and of parents to children; duties of huſ-
'bands and wives; of rulers and ſubjects; of friend-
'ſhip and good neighbourhood; and *all duties* that
'we owe *to God* as our *creator*, *preſerver* and *bountiful be-*

'*nefactor*;

'*nefactor*; and all duties *whatſoever*, conſidered as *re-*
'*quired by God*, and as branches of our *duty to him*; and
'alſo conſidered as what are to be performed with *re-*
'*gard to Chriſt*, as acts of obedience to his precepts, &
'as *teſtimonies* of *reſpect* to him, and of *our regard* to what
'he has done for us, the *virtues* he has exerciſed *towards*
'*us*, and the benefits we have and hope for from him.'
There is a manifeſt juſtice and moral fitneſs in all theſe relative duties, and a high degree of ſecondary beauty, like that of a piece of flowered chints, but nothing virtuous in them merely as loved and practiſed from a view and regard to their relative fitneſs and great equitableneſs; but only as they flow from ſimple benevolence to being, *ſimply conſidered*, or as unclothed either with moral or relative character. Could you have thought it? Can you believe it?--Our worthy author proceeds thus,

'It is this *ſecondary* kind of beauty, which belongs to
'the virtues and duties required of us, that Mr. Wal-
'laſton ſeems to have had in his eye, when he reſolved all
'virtue into an agreement of inclinations, volitions and
'actions with truth. He evidently has reſpect to the
'*juſtice* there is in the virtues and duties of one being to-
'wards another; which *conſiſts* in one being's expreſſing
'ſuch affections and uſing ſuch a conduct towards ano-
'ther, as hath a natural agreement and proportion to
'what is in them: which is as much a *natural conformity*
'of affection and action with its ground, object and oc-
'caſion, as that which is between a true propoſition and
'the thing ſpoken of in it,' (yet there is nothing of the nature of true virtue in all this.)

'But there is another and *higher* beauty in *true* virtue,
'and in *all truly virtuous* diſpoſitions and exerciſes, than
'what conſiſts in any uniformity or ſimilarity of various
'things' (or in the moral fitneſs and equitableneſs of the diſpoſitions and actions of moral beings towards each other) 'viz. the union of heart to being *in general*, which
'appears in thoſe virtues; and which, thoſe virtues *when*
'*true*, are the various *expreſſions of*. Benevolence to be-

'ing

'ing in general, or to being *ſimply conſidered*, is *intirely a 'diſtinct thing* from uniformity in the midſt of variety;' (or from an equitable behaviour to God and man, from a regard to their perſonal and relative characters) 'and 'is a *ſuperior* kind of beauty. ‡

Enough, I preſume, has been quoted on this head to give the reader a clear idea of this great man's notions concerning what he calls the only true moral beauty, of moral beings, in which he places the eſſence of true virtue; and what he calls the inferior, ſecondary beauty, in which, he ſays, virtue does not conſiſt, any more than in a harmonious tune.—Let us now examine them a little. But their falſhood and abſurdity are ſo open and glaring, that it is difficult to ſay any thing to render it more ſtriking. However we may view this doctrine in various lights, and obſerve ſome of its conſequences.

1. If this doctrine is true, God's revealed law, which is profeſſedly the guide to true virtue, the rule and ſtandard of it, no where commands, recommends, or once mentions that *in which* all *true* virtue *primarily* and *moſt eſſentially conſiſts*; but only injoins and recommends it in regard to its ſecondary beauty.

If I miſtake not, Mr. Edwards does implicitly acknowledge this in what has been tranſcribed above.—Now certainly, that the law and ſtandard of true virtue ſhould take no notice of that in which it does moſt eſſentially conſiſt, is a more wonderful myſtery than any of thoſe that belong to revealed religion.

2. If this doctrine is true, it may be ſuſpected, that the holy and inſpired men of old, prophets and apoſtles, never knew or practiſed true virtue. Whenever they recommend thoſe works or actions which are virtuous, they do it by repreſenting their ſecondary beauty, in which virtue does not conſiſt, any more than in the beauty of a ſquare.---When they praiſe and honor the virtues of God, and Jeſus Chriſt, in their rapturous devotions, they dwell upon their relative aſpects, and inferior

‡ p. 140, 141, 142.

ferior beauty, consisting in mental proportion and harmony, and are profoundly silent about their primary, & only true moral beauty. They don't '*go to the bottom of things*,' and lay open their root and first spring. Probably they knew nothing of it. Thus David praises God, saying, 'The Lord rewarded me according as I did a-'right---With the pure and upright thou wilt shew thy-'self pure and upright: With the froward, thou wilt 'shew thyself froward.' He is here praising God for the proportion and agreement of his works with their objects and occasions, which is not the thing in which their virtuousness consists.---Indeed he says, God's tender mercies are over all the works of his hands; and the Apostle says, he is the father of the whole family of heaven and earth: Which perhaps may be thought by some, to refer to the first principle of all true virtue, viz. Pure benevolence to being *simply considered*. But it is observable that they put more into the character of these objects of God's paternal care, and tender mercies, than belongs to being simply considered, or as only having perception and will. They are thus regarded, as being the works of his hands, and members of his family. They are therefore, *relatively considered*, objects of God's benevolent, paternal regard: And in this view of them there is a natural suitableness, and a kind of justice in their being so regarded. This is an inferior kind of beauty, not virtuous in itself, but only as this paternal, tender care for his *own* creatures, arises out of pure benevolence to being, *simply* considered. Is it indeed so?

Moreover, the angels of God, and the whole church in heaven, appear to take as little notice of the primary and only true moral beauty, as the prophets and apostles have done. In their songs of praise to God and the Lamb, they dwell upon the secondary beauty of their virtuous works, and are in raptures in their contemplations of it. 'Thou art righteous, O Lord,---because thou 'hast judged thus: for they have shed the blood of 'saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to

'drink, for they are worthy.' ‡ It is the beauty of God's judgment, as righteous or juſt, 'conſiſting in the a-'greement, and harmonious proportion' of different 'things, that have relation to one another, in nature, 'manner and meaſure,' that is here praiſed; but this is 'the very ſame *ſort* of beauty with that uniformity and 'proportion which is obſervable in thoſe material things 'which are eſteemed beautiful.' Why did not the angel of the waters, on this great occaſion, take notice of that firſt ſpring, benevolence to ſimple being, which influenced this judgment, and *ſanctified* the *righteouſneſs* of it, and raiſed it into virtue, and gave it the luſtre of the primary and only true moral beauty? Doubtleſs he tho't its virtuouſneſs and true beauty conſiſted in its righteouſneſs. 'Tis alſo obſervable that the wiſeſt and holieſt men in the church, thro' all ages, have expreſſed themſelves in their writings, and books of devotion, as ſuppoſing the *ſecondary* beauty of virtuous affections and actions was their *true* beauty. That it is not ſo, but only an inferior kind of beauty, like that of bodies, is a *new* diſcovery, reſerved for our age and country. But it is more probable that one truly great and good man ſhould have unhappily reaſoned himſelf into ſpeculative error, than that the whole church in heaven and earth ſhould, till now, have overlooked the primary and only true moral beauty and excellence of moral beings.

3. Let it alſo be obſerved that there is no ſuch object of God's attention and regard, as being *ſimply conſidered*. God is his own firſt object. He ſees himſelf as he is, as poſſeſſed of an abſolute fullneſs of being, enriched and adorned with all poſſible mental perfections. As ſuch he is the primary object of his firſt and chief love, both of benevolence and complacence. How ridiculous would it be to repreſent him, as firſt viewing himſelf, as poſſeſſed of infinite degrees of being, ſimply conſidered, and in this view exerciſing primary, pure benevolence to himſelf; and then reflecting on himſelf as thus virtuouſly benevolent,

‡ Rev. 16. 5, 6.

benevolent, making himſelf, as ſuch, the ſecondary object of greater benevolence, and the firſt object of his own complacence? Yet ſo it muſt be, upon this ſcheme.

All other mental being, whether future or actually exiſting, is ſeen by God, as ſhared in various proportions among a great number of diſtinct beings, and theſe are all regarded as *his creatures* and *property*, made for certain valuable ends. *As ſuch* they are objects of his paternal benevolence and care, in various degrees, wiſely and equitably proportioned to the various importance of their reſpective being, and deſtined uſe and end.

What now is become of being ſimply conſidered, the grand, primary object of virtuous love? It is vaniſhed as a ſhadow, or a night viſion.

4. Let us next conſider the deſtructive influence of this notion of virtue, upon virtue itſelf. All relative duties which we owe to God, to Jeſus Chriſt, and our fellow ſervants, in all our various relations to them, and connections with them, partake of the nature of juſtice: they are equitable, fit and right in their own nature: they have a natural agreement and harmonious proportionableneſs to the nature and characters of their reſpective objects, as compared with our own, and to the relations and connections between the agent and the objects of theſe duties. All this you ſee and approve, & the diſpoſitions and exerciſes of your mind or heart towards all the objects of theſe relative duties, are natural, harmoniouſly proportionable to them, and in concord with them, equitably ſuited to them. Your heart then is very beautiful, but not at all virtuous, if theſe harmonious and equitable diſpoſitions and exerciſes of your mind do not ariſe from pure benevolence to being, ſimply conſidered, 'which is the true and moral beauty of beings that have underſtanding.' So then the beauty of your mind as adorned with all theſe relative, equitable and harmonious diſpoſitions *only*, is of the ſame ſort with that of bodies. Your heart is as beautiful as a ſquare or a cube, and no more virtuous than they. 'Tis

'true

'true that benevolence to being in general, when a per-
'ſon hath it, will naturally incline him to juſtice or pro-
'portion in the exerciſe of it to particular beings.'—
But then, as Mr. Edwards adds. 'It appears, that *juſt*
'affections and acts have a beauty in them *diſtinct from*,
'and ſuperior to the uniformity and equality there is in
'them;—and that is the expreſſion and manifeſtation
'there is in them of benevolence to being in general.' *

Mr. Edwards ſums up the matter thus, 'From all
'that has been obſerved concerning this *ſecondary* kind
'of beauty, it appears that, *that* diſpoſition or ſenſe of
'the mind which conſiſts in a determination of mind to
'approve and be pleaſed with this beauty, conſidered
'ſimply and by itſelf, has *nothing* of the nature of true
'virtue, and is *intirely* a different thing from a truly vir-
'tuous taſte. For it has been ſhewn that this kind of
'beauty is *intirely diverſe* from the beauty of true virtue.
'And therefore it will follow that a taſte for this kind
'of beauty, is intirely a different thing from a taſte of
'true virtue. Who will affirm that a diſpoſition to ap-
'prove the harmony of good muſic, or the beauty of a
'ſquare, is the ſame with true holineſs, or a truly virtu-
'ous diſpoſition of mind'? § No man, I preſume, ever will. But if ſome one ſhould, he would not talk more abſurdly than this great and worthy gentleman does, when he reduces moral harmony, and juſt proportion to a beauty or excellence of the '*very ſame ſort*' with that of muſic or a ſquare.

If this good man had attended to one obvious diſtinction he might have ſaved himſelf from falling into this grand abſurdity, viz. The difference there is, in the nature of the things, between the mind's ſeeing and approving the harmonious proportion and juſtneſs of virtuous diſpoſitions and exerciſes of heart, towards God & our neighbour, and having ſuch diſpoſitions and exerciſes himſelf. A man may ſee and approve the beauty and excellence of virtue, in ſome degree, and yet his heart not be in this beautifully harmonious and equitable

* p. 142, 143. § p. 144.

temper

temper and ſtate. Nothing is more common, and nothing more to be lamented, than this monſtrous inconſiſtence between the moral ſenſe or taſtè of the mind, and the ruling diſpoſitions and exerciſes of the heart of man.

Mr. Edwards concludes this chapter with this obſervation, which cloſes the proof of his doctrine, 'Not 'only reaſon, but experience plainly ſhews, that men's 'approbation of this ſort of beauty' (the *ſecondary* beauty of moral beings and actions) 'does not ſpring from any 'virtuous temper, and has *no connection* with virtue. For 'otherwiſe men's *delight* in the beauty of *ſquares*, *cubes*, 'and regular polygons, and the beautiful figures in a 'piece of embroidery, would increaſe in proportion to 'men's virtue; and would be raiſed to a great height in 'ſome eminently virtuous and holy men.' † Wonderful! Here an appeal is made to experience, and the argument is built on this ſuppoſition, that moral proportion and harmony is a beauty of the ſame kind with that of material things. It is not poſſible to conceive any thing more abſurd. I deſire any one to take a human mind, adorned with all right, relative affections and exerciſes to Jeſus Chriſt, harmoniouſly agreable, and beautifully proportioned to his characters and relations to us, (only excluding benevolence to being ſimply conſidered, and let the faith of him be their ſpring) and carefully compare it with a ſquare, a cube, and a beautiful piece of embroidery, and try if he can diſcover any ſuch likeneſs in their beauties as to lead him to pronounce them 'beauties of the very ſame ſort' or order. He will as ſoon diſcover the actions of a ſpirit to be of the ſame kind with the action or motions of a clock.

The truth is, this marvellous ſcheme has changed the natural, moral beauty and glory of true virtue, into an image made like to the beauty of an equilateral triangle or a cheſs-board.

Mr. Edwards, ſpeaking of what he calls the only true moral beauty, or the firſt principle of true virtue, ſays, 'It 'is impoſſible that any one ſhould truly reliſh this beauty,

† p. 144. 'con-

'consisting in general benevolence' (to being in general, simply considered) 'who has not that temper himself.‡ 'After benevolence to being in general exists, the pro-'portion which is observed in objects,' (or, as it is expressed a few lines above 'the degree of being, and the 'degree of benevolence to being, that particular beings 'have) may be the cause of the proportion of benevo-'lence to those objects: But *no proportion*, is the *cause* or '*ground* of the *existence* of such a thing as benevolence 'to being. The tendency of objects to excite that 'degree of benevolence, which is proportionable to the 'degree of being, &c. is the *consequence* of the *existence* of 'benevolence, and *not the ground* of it. Even as a ten-'dency of bodies one to another, by mutual attraction, 'in proportion to the quantity of matter, is the conse-'quence of the being of such a thing as attraction, and 'not attraction the effect of proportion.' †.

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‡ p. 125.

† According to this doctrine the nature and character, or perfections of God, are *no cause* or *ground* of the first existence of a virtuous or holy principle in the hearts of created, intelligent beings. Our minds must first attract towards universal being, *simply considered*, by pure, undistinguishing benevolence, before God can attract them towards himself, by the virtue of his glorious character. No possible manifestation of his glory, in the face of Jesus Christ, can have any influence in drawing our hearts to him, unless they first attract towards him as a part of general being, by a general benevolence, existing independently of, and prior to any moral influence of the divine character upon the mind. This has no possible influence in first raising the virtuous principle in the mind, but only in giving it a chief direction and tendency to God, after it does exist. This is the same absurdity in moral philosophy, as it would be in natural, to affirm that a loadstone can't attract iron towards itself, till that is first endowed with a peculiar attracting tendency to stones in general, simply considered as stone.

I should be glad to know how the general attraction or propensity of mind to being, comes into existence. Nothing in its object, no influence from any quantity of being, or virtuous attraction of any being upon the mind, is the cause or ground of it; and it is confessed not to be natural to man, and that no possible exertion of our minds can give it being. It must then be a preternatural, blind instinct, which the possessor can give no account of, and assign no reason for. If you ask him why he is so graciously benevolent to being simply considered, he

This great man would have done well to have reflected here, that the moral and virtuous attraction, or benevolent propenſity of minds to minds, is firſt and chiefly in God, the father of ſpirits, (and is, in him a paternal affection) and is communicated to his offſpring, created ſpirits, in conſequence of, and by the means of his giving them to feel in themſelves his attracting love and virtue, and *paternal* benevolence and propenſity of heart towards them;

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he can only anſwer, I love it becauſe I do love it, but don't know what I love it for. And yet 'all true virtue conſiſts primarily and 'moſt eſſentially in it, and all particular virtues ariſe out of it, as their 'root.'—This is much ſuch a foundation to virtue as the Indian's tortoiſe was to the earth; which, he ſaid bore it upon its back. When he was aſk'd what the tortoiſe ſtood upon, he cry'd out with ſurpriſe, 'me don't know.'

This doctrine of Mr. Edwards ſeems to be the foundation on which ſeveral doctrines, in the *new* ſcheme of divinity, are built, and ſerves as a key to explain them, (Mr. Hopkins, in his late *animadverſions*, refers to Mr. Edwards's diſſertation on virtue, as containing their fundamental principles.) Theſe, in particular, viz. That 'the moral perfections and character of God, as revealed by the goſpel, and ſeen by natural men, under the teachings of the word and ſpirit of Jeſus Chriſt, ſo far as they are capable of ſeeing them, can have no poſſible influence in producing a moral change in their hearts.—Regeneration conſiſts in giving or planting in the heart a new ſpiritual taſte or reliſh, (i. e. as I underſtand them, a ſpirit of benevolence or preparation of heart to be benevolent to being *ſimply conſidered*)—this change is not wro't by the inſtrumentality of light, or by any means whatever; the word of God is not a means in the hand of the Spirit in working this change; but it is effected by mere, abſolute, and properly creating power; in which an entirely new taſte is given for moral beauty (Mr. Edwards's primary beauty) which never was or could be ſeen or taſted before, in the leaſt degree.—Nothing that ſimple intellect is capable of, can give the idea of any thing properly moral, &c. &c. By *moral*, moral excellence, and ſuch like phraſes, underſtand what Mr. Edwards calls the primary beauty and the true moral excellence, & true virtuouſneſs, and all this kind of myſterious, and apparently abſurd language will be unfolded at once: But it will not be the leſs abſurd for being underſtood. If by the moral change, or new, ſupernatural, virtuous taſte gentlemen ſpeak of, they mean benevolence to being *ſimply conſidered*, they very juſtly repreſent this change as wro't in the dark, and without means. If this be the thing intended, as I think it is, it would be kind in them to ſpeak out plainly, as Mr. Edwards does, that the people might clearly underſtand the nature of their doctrine. They would then know what to ſay to it.

them; by a realizing belief of which, their hearts are put in motion towards him, and attract, or tend to him, *firſt* and *chiefly*, as their center and end: and ſecondarily, draw their brother minds, by benevolent wiſhes that they would unite with them in their love and tendency to God, their common father and center. All true virtue, and virtuous love begins thus. That infinite proportion of ſpiritual excellence and love which is in God, as perceived and realized by created minds, and felt, as extended to them, is the true *cauſe*, *ground*, and *ſource* of the firſt exiſtence of ſuch a thing in them as a truly virtuous tendency or propenſity of heart; which firſt and chiefly directs itſelf to him, and in ſubordination to him, to brother minds.

To repreſent benevolence to being ſimply conſidered, uncharactered, and unrelated, as the eſſence and root of all true virtue, out of which love to God and our neighbour ariſes, and as pre-exiſting there, in the order of nature, is not *metaphyſical*, but imaginary and arbitrary, unworthy of a moral philoſopher, and *wholly contrary* to that *true divinity* which is taught us from heaven. *

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* Mr. Edwards is eſteemed a great maſter of *metaphiſical* reaſoning; and his followers ſeem to value themſelves for their ſkill in it, and to imagine they *demonſtrate* their doctrines to be true. Many others, clearly ſeeing their notions are falſe and abſurd, cry out againſt metaphiſical reaſoning as uncertain, and rather adapted to obſcure & perplex things, than to diſcover and vindicate truth. Both ſides, I think, are miſtaken. Well connected reaſonings, built on the known natures of things, are ſure, and their reſult true. But the common fault is, that men ſubſtitute falſe metaphiſicks for true. They imagine things different in their nature from what they really are; and reaſoning on this falſe ground, tho' the intermediate links in their chain are well connected, yet their reaſonings conclude wrong, and land them in glaring falſhood and abſurdity. If the firſt principles are falſe and imaginary, and the reaſoning upon them is juſt, the concluſion will neceſſarily be wrong: And thus by miſrepreſenting the true nature of the things on which the reaſonings are founded, ſyſtems of error are eſtabliſhed, and ſeemingly juſt reaſonings end in the greateſt abſurdities.—Thus Dr. Clark, with many other great men, imagining the preſence and extenſion of ſpirits analogous to that of bodies, and reaſoning on this ground, concerning the immenſity of the divine Being,

The reader will be well pleaſed to ſee this confirmed by the author of the diſſertation on the nature of true virtue; obſerve then the following paſſage. 'It may 'be aſſerted in general, that *nothing* is of the *nature* 'of *true* virtue, in which *God is not the firſt* and the laſt; 'or which, with regard to their exerciſes in general, have 'not their *firſt foundation* and *ſource*, *in apprehenſions* of 'God's *ſupreme dignity* and *glory*, and in *anſwerable* eſteem 'and love of him, and have not reſpect to God as the 'ſupreme end.' (p. 134.) Conſequently, pure benevolence to being *ſimply conſidered*, is ſo far from being the root and eſſence of all true virtue, that it has 'nothing of the nature of true virtue in it.

CHAP. IV.

Of Mr. Edwards's notions concerning natural conſcience, and the moral ſenſe.

I Paſs over Mr. Edwards's fourth chapter, in which he treats of ſelf-love, as little to my purpoſe: But in the fifth, wherein he treats of natural conſcience, and

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Being, involves himſelf in inextricable perplexities. Thus alſo Mr. Edwards firſt gives virtue an imaginary nature and eſſence or root; and then reaſoning juſtly on this falſe foundation involves himſelf in many grand abſurdities, and confounds the nature of virtue and vice, and changes God's moral government into an abſurd tyranny. This is not true, metaphiſical, but imaginary and arbitrary reaſoning.—This great man's ſcheme and reaſonings concerning the freedom of the will, have a like imaginary foundation, and end in evident falſhoods, and moſt deſtructive errors. This worthy Gentleman has been very unhappy in ſundry other matters, in miſtaking the nature of things, and ſubſtituting imaginations for realities, and building upon them, and admitting their conſequences, as tho' they were a ſure foundation. And too many of his admirers are unhappily caught in the ſame ſnare. They ſeem to reaſon with clearneſs and ſtrength, and look down with a ſort of contemptuous pity on thoſe who are not convinced by them, as weak or blind; but their foundation principles are falſe; they miſtake the nature of things, feign it to be another thing than it really is. When the root of our reaſonings is as rottenneſs, the bloſſom will go up as duſt. The only way in which thoſe who are thus entangled in the labyrinth of falſe metaphiſicks, can diſingage themſelves, is by carefully examining their foundation principles, and learning to take their ideas of the nature of things from the things themſelves as they really are, and not ſuffer their minds to be impoſed on by an imagi-

the moral ſenſe, there are ſome things that draw attention. He ſays, 'Natural conſcience conſiſts in theſe 'two things, viz.

'1. In—that diſpoſition to approve or diſapprove the 'moral treatment which paſſes between us and others, 'from a determination of the mind, to be *eaſy* or *uneaſy*, 'in a conſciouſneſs of our being *conſiſtent* or *inconſiſtent* '*with ourſelves*.' ‡ This gives no idea at all of the nature and true character of conſcience. That determines us to be eaſy or uneaſy in reflecting on our own moral conduct, as we judge it to be conſiſtent or inconſiſtent with the *law of God*, and ſo to deſerve approbation or blame from him. If our tho'ts look no further than to *ſelf-conſiſtence* as the *ground* of ſelf-ſatisfaction, conſcience has no more concern in the matter, than it has in the eaſineſs, or uneaſineſs a man feels in himſelf, in reflecting on a ſcheme of buſineſs as a ſelf-conſiſtent, or inconſiſtent ſcheme.

'2. The other thing which belongs to the approbati-'on or diſapprobation of natural conſcience, is the *ſenſe* '*of deſert*; conſiſting in a natural agreement, proportion 'and harmony between malevolence or injury, and re-'ſentment and puniſhment; or between loving and be-'ing loved, between ſhewing kindneſs and being reward-'ed, &c.—Approbation and diſapprobation of conſci-'ence, in the ſenſe now explained, will extend to all 'virtue and vice, to every thing *whatſoever*, that is *mo-'rally* good or evil, in a mind---that will take things in 'general into its conſideration, and is free from ſpecula-'tive error.—And thus we may ſee in what reſpects this 'natural conſcience extends to true virtue, conſiſting in 'union of heart to being *in general*, and ſupreme love to 'God. For altho' it *ſees not*, or rather, does not taſte 'its *primary* and *eſſential* beauty, i. e. it taſtes no *ſweetneſs* 'in benevolence to being in general, *ſimply conſidered*, or loves

nary and arbitrary miſrepreſentation of their nature. If this was done, the doctrinal errors of the day, which make ſo great a noiſe, would ſoon vaniſh away, and become like an untimely birth.

‡ p. 162.

'loves it not for being in general's *ſake*, (for nothing but 'general benevolence itſelf can do that) yet this natural 'conſcience, common to mankind, may approve of it' (of virtue) 'from that uniformity, equality and juſtice 'there is in it, and the demerit there is ſeen in the con-'trary.——Men by natural conſcience may ſee the juſ-'tice (or natural agreement) there is in yielding all to 'God, as we receive all from God; and the juſtice there 'is in being his that made us, and being willingly ſo;-- 'and alſo the juſtice there is in our ſupreme love to God 'for his goodneſs,——the natural agreement there is 'between our having ſupreme reſpect to him, who ex-'erciſes infinite goodneſs to us, and from whom we re-'ceive all well-being.---Thus natural conſcience, if well 'informed, will approve of *true* virtue, and will diſap-'prove and condemn the *want of it*; and yet *without ſee-'ing* the *true beauty* of it. † (That is, without being able to ſee or taſte that in which its eſſence and diſtinguiſh-ing nature wholly conſiſts.) And yet he preſently adds, I think, very inconſiſtently, 'If men's conſciences were 'fully enlightened---as they will be at the day of judg-'ment, they would approve *nothing but true virtue*; no-'thing but general benevolence, and thoſe affections and 'actions that are conſiſtent with it, and ſubordinate to 'it.' ‡ And yet this ſame natural conſcience does not ſee, and can't taſte this true virtue, conſiſting in general benevolence, 'nothing but benevolence itſelf can do that.' He alſo ſays, natural 'conſcience approves *true* virtue, 'and indeed approves nothing that *falls ſhort* of it.' * But the ſecondary beauty falls ſhort of it. Thus natural conſcience does, and does not, can, and can't taſte or ap-prove the true beauty of virtue; which general benevo-lence, or a truly virtuous heart alone can do: and at the day of judgment natural conſcience will be ſo improved as to ſee the true beauty of virtue, conſiſting in general benevolence, and wholly approve it; which nothing but virtuous benevolence can do. Will not the wicked then become

† p. 162—164. ‡ p. 165. * p. 179.

become virtuous according to this doctrine? Error is fated to run crooked. The greateſt men can't govern and keep it ſtrait. It is our wiſdom to have nothing to do with it. Since ſo great a man as Mr. Edwards could not alter its crooked nature, but was drawn, by its wiley turnings, into numberleſs inconſiſtencies, 'tis in vain for others to attempt to manage ſo involv'd a creature.

But let us attend our author. He ſays, 'That *moral ſenſe*, which is *natural* to mankind---is the ſame with this natural conſcience——The ſenſe of *moral* good & evil, and the diſpoſition to *approve virtue*, and diſapprove vice, which men have by natural conſcience, is that moral ſenſe ſo much inſiſted on in the writings of many of late.---Some of the arguments made uſe of by theſe writers do indeed prove that there is a *moral ſenſe* or *taſte univerſal* among men, *diſtinct from* what ariſes from ſelf-love.' Or, as it is expreſſed a few lines lower, 'There is a moral taſte or ſenſe of *moral* good and evil *natural to all*, which don't properly ariſe from ſelf-love. Yet I conceive there are no inſtances of this kind which may not be refer'd to that which I have obſerved to be primary in the approbation of natural conſcience, viz. A ſenſe of *deſert*, and approbation of that *natural agreement* there is in manner and meaſure, in juſtice.---This' moral 'ſenſe of equality and natural agreement' (in moral things) 'extends to all *moral* good and evil.---Thus natural conſcience, if the underſtanding be properly enlightened, and errors and blinding, ſtupifying prejudices are removed, concurs with the law of God, and is of equal extent with it, and joyns its voice with it in every article.' [p.163.] 'This moral ſenſe, if the underſtanding be well informed, and be exerciſed at liberty, and in an extenſive manner, without being reſtrained to a private ſphere, *approves the very ſame things* which a ſpiritual and divine ſenſe approves; tho' *not on the ſame grounds*, nor with the *ſame kind* of approbation.' (p.188.)

Let us now make a few obſervations on theſe things, and ſome proper reflections on the whole.

1. Mr. Edwards acknowledges, as we have ſeen, that there is, in natural conſcience, a moral taſte or ſenſe of moral good and evil, or of virtue and vice determining the mind to approve the one and condemn the other; that this ſenſe concurs with the law of God, and is of equal extent with it; ſuppoſing the underſtanding duly informed, &c. This is true in itſelf, and as much as any moral philoſopher can in reaſon demand; but is not true, on his ſcheme, but is utterly inconſiſtent with his notions of the eſſence of virtue and moral beauty or excellence: Which, according to him, eſſentially conſiſts in pure benevolence to being, ſimply conſidered; which natural conſcience don't, and can't ſee, and the moral taſte can't reliſh: that the inferior beauty of moral things, in which their virtuouſneſs does not at all conſiſt, and 'which is of the 'ſame ſort' with the beauty of inanimate things is the only object of this faculty called conſcience and moral ſenſe. If ſo, this natural ſenſe or taſte is not at all of the moral kind any more than a natural taſte for muſic or painting. Mr. Edwards ſays, 'natural conſcience---will approve of true virtue without ſeeing the true beauty of it.' Approve of that which you have no idea of, no reliſh for. Is not this a contradiction? 'Tis the ſame thing, upon his ſcheme, as to ſay that a man who ſees and approves the beautiful countenance and dreſs of an angel, in ſo doing approves of his virtue, when at the ſame time he has no conception or reliſh of it.

2. Mr. Edwards ſays, 'Benevolence *alone* can taſte the ſweetneſs, or diſcern the beauty of true virtue, conſiſting in benevolence to being ſimply conſidered. The natural conſcience and moral ſenſe can't diſcern and reliſh this true moral beauty. How ſhould it? This moral faculty was given us, and is fitted in its nature for the purpoſe of diſcerning and approving the moral fitneſs, proportion and equity there is in the relative duties we owe to God and our neighbour.---But we have no ſuch relation to being ſimply conſidered, and that has no ſuch characters

characters as to infer a natural or moral fitneſs or equity in our performing any duty to it. Natural conſcience is wholly ignorant of it, and as unintereſted in it, as in a dream, or in the phantoms in Milton's limbo of vanity. Our author implicitly owns that there is no natural juſtice and proportion in this kind of benevolence. His diſtinction between the primary and ſecondary beauty is grounded on this ſuppoſition.---If we ſuppoſe there is a natural juſtice, proportion, or harmonious agreement between this ſimple benevolence and its object, or any ſuitableneſs therein to the characters and relations of being ſimply conſidered, and that the benevolent mind, has a regard hereto, in exerciſing this benevolence, we reduce this primary and eſſential moral beauty into a *ſecondary*, and ſo the very eſſence of virtue will vaniſh and be loſt.

3. Mr. Edwards acknowledges, as we have ſeen, that there is, in natural conſcience a ſenſe of *deſert*, and that it is connected with the moral taſte and approbation of the proportion and juſtice there is in all thoſe relative duties we owe to God and our neighbour; and he allows that this connection which natural conſcience makes, is juſt, and agreeable to the true nature of things. And yet he ſays that the true virtuouſneſs of theſe actions or duties does not conſiſt in any ſuch natural proportion, fitneſs or juſtice, but in ſomething of a higher and very different nature, even in this that they flow from, and are the expreſſions of benevolence to being ſimply conſidered.---This worthy gentleman is totally inconſiſtent with himſelf in theſe things.——

Moral deſert is neceſſarily connected with, and has a natural and direct relation to, that quality in moral actions wherein their virtuouſneſs or vicioufneſs conſiſts, and to nothing elſe. To ſuppoſe the contrary is the higheſt poſſible abſurdity.

If then natural conſcience points out the moral ground of deſert, of approbation or blame *truly*, Mr. Edwards's notions of the nature and eſſence of virtue are eſſentially wrong. But if his notions are right, natural conſcience has

has no perception or ſenſe of that quality in moral actions wherein their virtuouſneſs eſſentially conſiſts, but, as a wrong headed thing, places it in that wherein it does not at all conſiſt, and ſo connects the ſenſe of deſert wrong, and contrary to the true nature of things. He who form'd the natural conſcience or moral ſenſe, ſuch as it is, is then the author of this *falſe connection* of deſert, and has given us a guide to virtue, which, from the very conſtitution of its nature, unavoidably deceives us. Indeed it leads us, as our author ſays, to judge all thoſe moral actions virtuous which are really ſo, and none but ſuch; ſuppoſing it is duly enlightened. But then it leads us to place their virtuouſneſs in their *ſecondary* beauty, and does not perceive and can't reliſh that quality in which their virtuouſneſs does moſt eſſentially and wholly conſiſt; (as Mr. Edwards conceeds.) And herein it naturally and neceſſarily deceives us, and leads us to approve our actions as virtuous and acceptable, while there is no more true virtuouſneſs in them than in ſinging a harmonious tune. Has God given to mankind ſuch a blundering, blind leader, as the natural guide of life, think you?

4. Let us obſerve wherein Mr. Edwards places the eſſential difference between the moral ſenſe or taſte, and a truly *ſpiritual* ſenſe, or *virtuous* taſte. He allows, as we have ſeen, that they both approve and condemn the ſame things, i. e. all morally good and evil actions; but ſays they do this upon different grounds, and with different kinds of approbation. The moral taſte reliſhes virtuous actions, *only* on account of their ſecondary beauty; the truly virtuous ſenſe approves them, *chiefly* on account of their primary beauty, conſiſting in benevolence to being ſimply conſidered. I muſt deſire the readers attention to two ſhort quotations more; which complete the evidence that this is Mr. Edwards's notion of the difference between the *moral*, and *virtuous* taſte. He ſays, 'Approbation of conſcience is the more readily miſtaken for a truly

* p. 179. § p. 165.

'truly virtuous approbation, becauſe,——when the con-
'ſcience is well informed, and thoroughly awakened, it
'agrees with the latter *fully* and *actually* as to the object
'approved, tho' not as to the ground and reaſon of ap-
'proving.' * Are the primary and ſecondary beauty the ſame object? 'God has eſtabliſhed---that this principle
'of natural conſcience, which, tho' it implies no ſuch
'thing as benevolence to being in general, nor any de-
'light in ſuch a principle, ſimply conſidered, and *ſo* im-
'plys no truly ſpiritual ſenſe, or virtuous taſte, yet ſhould
'approve and condemn the ſame things that are ap-
'proved and condemned by a ſpiritual ſenſe or virtuous
'taſte.' § —There is doubtleſs a real and *eſſential* difference between that moral taſte or ſenſe, which is natural to man, and univerſal, in ſome degree of it, and a truly virtuous taſte or holy ſenſe, which is peculiar to virtuous men. But it can't conſiſt in what this great man here places it in.

This is a ſubject of ſo great, practical importance, that we may properly employ a few tho'ts upon it.—Mr. Edwards's reaſoning ſuppoſes that if the true virtuouſneſs of morally good actions conſiſted in thoſe qualities, of moral proportion, harmony and juſtice, on account of which natural conſcience, or the moral ſenſe approves and reliſhes them, this approbation would be virtuous; and ſo natural or vicious men would be virtuous men. But in this he is greatly miſtaken.

By the moral diſcernment and taſte, natural to man, we are conſtituted moral agents. By the exerciſe of this moral faculty the things that are morally good or virtuous are ſeen to be *ſo*, *as ſuch* are approved, the obligation we are under to chooſe and practiſe them, in preference to every thing that ſtands in oppoſition to them, is felt, in ſome degree. If we do ſo, we are ſelf-approved; but if we ſuffer vicious luſts, and worldly intereſts to prevail, in oppoſition to this ſenſe of the mind, we are condemned by ourſelves. All this ſhews that man is deſigned for virtue in his creation, and that his happineſs

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* p. 174. § p. 165.

is connected with his being virtuous, but does not render him ſo. To render a man truly virtuous or holy, his heart muſt agree with his enlightned conſcience, or moral ſenſe; or in other words his will muſt chooſe, with prefering love, and a determined reſolution to practiſe, what is approved and recommended by the moral ſenſe; and this, not in ſome particular branches of virtue only, but in its whole extent, giving up every contrary luſt to be mortified, and all inconſiſtent intereſts, as loſs for its ſake, or which is the ſame thing, for God's ſake and his kingdom's. This ſenſe, choice and attachment of the heart to God, or to virtue and its intereſts, is that wherein a truly virtuous taſte or ſpiritual ſenſe conſiſts, as diſtinguiſhed from the natural, moral ſenſe of the mind. They are really two diſtinct things, tho' in perfect harmony. In virtuous minds they both agree in one; but in vicious minds the prevailing reliſh of the heart, or tendency and choice of the will, is in oppoſition to the moral ſenſe, in partial favour to particular luſts, and their intereſts. In this caſe the heart is perverſe, the man is froward and willful, condemned of himſelf in that which he allows. Herein conſiſts the exceeding ſinfulneſs of ſin. *

There is no cure for this evil diſeaſe of the heart, but by the grace and truths of the goſpel, as ſtrongly impreſſed upon the mind by the ſpirit of Jeſus Chriſt. If the perverſeneſs and obſtinacy of wicked minds prevails to that degree, under the enlightening influences and ſtrivings of the ſpirit of truth and grace, as to provoke the Lord to withdraw his gracious influences, and give them wholly up to their own hearts luſts, their perverſeneſs becomes abſolutely incureable, and they go into perdition. 'Tis in vain to expect a miraculous exertion of properly creating power, to form their hearts anew, or regenerate them, without light or the word of goſpel truth, after the moral power of the goſpel, and ſpirit of Jeſus Chriſt, has failed of doing it, thro' their perverſe reſiſtance of the Holy Ghoſt, and unconquerable enmity

* Rom. 7. 13, 14.

to the truth he teaches. Yet this is what ſome gentlemen do; who teach it for doctrine that men are always regenerated in this manner, and can be in no other; that their enmity and preverſe reſiſtance to the holy Spirit univerſally increaſes in proportion as he enlightens their minds, and ſtrives with them by the goſpel truth. This doctrine is directly contrary to the doctrine of the goſpel, and to experience, and of very hurtful tendency and influence.

5. From Mr. Edwards's doctrines it does neceſſarily follow that men are under *no natural* obligation to be virtuous at all according to his notion of virtue, and can't equitably be required to be ſo. They may indeed be required to practiſe all relative duties to particular beings, from a regard to their *ſecondary* beauty, or relative fitneſs; for God has made them capable of diſcerning and taſting this, by endowing them with moral ſenſe. But there is nothing virtuous in all this, 'conſidered ſimply, and by 'itſelf.' Benevolence to being, ſimply conſidered, and 'for being *in general*'s *ſake*, and delight in this principle '*ſimply conſidered*, is that in which all true virtue prima'rily conſiſts, out of which all truly virtuous exerciſes 'of mind to particular beings ariſe.' But natural conſcience and the moral ſenſe, can't taſte and approve this kind of virtue any more than the white of an egg; and natural reaſon, and common ſenſe ſay there is no worth in it, nor any uſe or occaſion for it in the moral world. Nothing but this preternatural principle itſelf can taſte the ſweetneſs of this primary beauty, or perceive any moral excellence in this ſort of virtue. Doubtleſs this is true; for it lies far beyond the ſphere of natural conſcience, and the moral taſte. It is no object to them, conſequently man is, by the conſtitution of his nature, as incapable of ſeeing, or taſting this *primary* beauty of moral things, as beaſts are of reliſhing their *ſecondary* beauty. He is no more made for the one, than they are for the other, and is no more obliged to reliſh the one than they are to reliſh the other; and can't equitably be required

to

to do ſo, til a new faculty, or taſte is given him, adapted to this object, by a new creating act of power; (which is what Mr. Edwards's diſciples, at the bottom, intend by what they call regeneration, if I underſtand their writings.) Yet Mr. Edwards's ſcheme, inconſiſtently enough with itſelf, ſays, he is ſo obliged, at the ſame time that it confeſſes he has, in his nature, no faculty, ſenſe or taſte, in the exerciſe of which it is poſſible for him ever to reach this beauty, however perfectly the underſtanding is inlightened, and freed from blinding, ſtupifying prejudices. Mr. Hopkins ſays, nothing that ſimple intellect is capable of, can give the idea of any thing *properly moral*. § By *moral*, I preſume he intends what Mr. Edwards calls the primary and only true moral beauty. And yet the intellect is the leading faculty, which conſtitutes us moral and accountable agents.

The teachers of theſe doctrines endeavour to defend them againſt the above objection, by ſaying, men's inability to reliſh the true beauty of virtue, or what they call, after Mr. Edwards, the true moral excellency, is of the moral kind, the fault of the will, and ſo does not excuſe: that if they had a will, a right diſpoſition and heart to this, it would then be no more impoſſible than any thing elſe.—This is no more than ſaying, if they had this new kind of reliſh, which is falſely called a truly ſpiritual ſenſe, or virtuous taſte, they would have it, and if they had it, they might eaſily exerciſe it. But what is this to the purpoſe, when at the ſame time they confeſs there is no natural faculty in human nature, by any poſſible application of truth to which, this taſte can be raiſed up in the heart? On theſe principles, we might, with as much reaſon, and as good a grace ſay, the inability a blind man is under to ſee and reliſh the beauty of light, is of the moral kind, and ſolemnly impute it to him as ſin.‡

You

§ Sermon of John 1. 13. p. 43.

‡ That kind of moral inability which does not excuſe from blame, but rather aggravates it, is that which our Saviour, and the prophets and

You might as reaſonably preach to your horſe, as St. Francis did to the fiſhes, and exhort him to ſee and admire the ſecondary beauty of moral things, as, on theſe principles, exhort natural men to ſee and reliſh their primary beauty. Suppoſe you ſhould, and becauſe he is ſo blind and ſtupid that your exhortation makes no impreſſion, and after all your endeavours he has no idea of this

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and apoſtles, charge upon the preverſe Jews, when they ſay, *they have eyes* and ſee not, ears and hear not, hearts capable of underſtanding, & yet underſtand not, that they have cloſed their own eyes, ſtopped their ears, and made their hearts groſs, leſt they ſhould ſee with their eyes, hear with their ears, and underſtand with their hearts, and be converted. It conſiſts in an indiſpoſition and perverſe refuſal to exert thoſe moral powers which men have; thro' partial attachment to the luſts and intereſts of ſin. But upon the principles of Mr. Edwards's ſcheme the inability of natural men to ſee, or rather taſte the ſweetneſs of what he calls virtue, conſiſts in the want of a natural faculty or taſte ſuited to the object: and according to his new notion of virtue, it truly does ſo. And to ſupply this defect in nature, a new faculty, or reliſh, quite of a new and ſupernatural kind is added in regeneration, by a new, creating act. This then is no more a moral inability than 'the want of a reliſh for the pleaſant ſweetneſs of ho-'ney, in a man who has no taſte for it, and never had.'* The one is as truly a natural or phyſical inability as the other, and is as much inconſiſtent with moral obligation.

Some will ſay, this loſs of the primitive taſte for the true moral beauty, is the fruit and puniſhment of the firſt apoſtacy.—Suppoſe it to be ſo; what is the conſequence?—Suppoſe, inſtead of taking away the original reliſh for the primary beauty, ſo intirely, that it can't be recovered but by a new act of creating power, 'altogether equivalent to firſt creation,' God had puniſhed the firſt ſin by ſmiting Adam with blindneſs, and bringing all his children into the world naturally blind. Would the preſent incapacity of man to reliſh the beauty of light, be a moral incapacity? Would a law from heaven, requiring him to ſee and rejoice in the light of the ſun, on the penalty of damnation, at the ſame time refuſing to reſtore his eyes, be tho't juſt? A Nero could not be brought to make ſuch a law.—The truth is, thro' the fall, all our original moral powers are weakened, but none of them deſtroyed; but the chief miſchief is, that a vicious indiſpoſition or averſion to improve the moral abilities or faculties we have, for the purpoſes of virtue and perſonal religion, has gotten hold of our hearts. This can be effectually ſubdued only by that grace and truth which came by Jeſus Chriſt; and was ſent down from heaven for this very end,

* See Hopkins's ſermon on John 1. 13. p. 41, 42.

this beauty, any more than his ſaddle, your wrath riſes againſt the poor beaſt, and you ſmite him with your ſtaff. Now ſuppoſe upon this, his mouth is opened, as the mouth of Balaam's aſs was, *rebuking the madneſs of the prophet*, and he ſhould in like manner rebuke yours, ſaying, 'The thing you require of me is wholly above me, my Maker has given me no moral taſte at all.' Would you anſwer him that his impotence is only of the moral kind; if he had ſuch a taſte, and would will to do it, he might eaſily taſte the ſweetneſs of this beauty? If you ſhould, ſuppoſing his inſpiration to continue, he would reply, this is the very thing I am naturally incapable of. You ſeem, ſir, not to know what you ſay. You muſt now be reduced to ſilence. The application is eaſy, and juſt. The horſe wants but one thing to enable him to taſte the ſecondary beauty, viz. Moral ſenſe: and man wants one to enable him to diſcern the primary beauty, viz. A ſpiritual ſenſe: And this is conceeded to be as unattainable by him, as the other is by the horſe, unleſs it is given by a miraculous, creating power.

This ſcheme of doctrines, tends to deſtroy true virtue and real religion. It repreſents virtue as an unnatural thing, places it on a falſe and indefenſible foundation, and pours contempt upon it, by repreſenting its true beauty, and moral excellencies as of the 'very ſame ſort with the beauty of material things.' If it is once believed that theſe are doctrines of the bible, chriſtianity will be rejected with great ſcorn; but they are not to be found there. Yet, ſomehow, this ſcheme has obtained too much credit in the country. While chriſtian divines propagate theſe notions, infidels triumph.—The great veneration for Mr. Edwards, will doubtleſs, in part, account for the great ſpread of his unhappy miſtakes. As the fear of man brings a ſnare, ſo does too great veneration. This has been the ſin and ſnare of theſe late times. It began to work powerfully about thirty years ago, in the almoſt idolatrous eſteem and veneration for a young clergyman from abroad. But let us venerate

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the one true Maſter in heaven, and receive his words as *oracles*. They are truly ſo.

Many perſons, no doubt, will be ſurprized to find ſo great and worthy a man as Mr. Edwards was, forming ſo wrong a ſcheme of thoughts.—They may be told, & have ſeen, he was inconſiſtent with himſelf, and ſometimes acknowledges the truth. In ſome paſſages he ſpeaks excellently. But his great unhappineſs was, he endeavoured to blend a ſet of imaginary notions with the truth; but he could not make them mix and cleave together. Hence the reigning inconſiſtency. 'Tis only the falſe part that has been expoſed and cenſured. This ought to be ſo, for truth and virtue's ſake.—Altho' *Being ſimply conſidered*, is ſet up as an idol of the imagination, yet we firmly believe, his heart never honored it with chief, nor with any love, but ſtatedly worſhiped the living God *only*, as the firſt and ſupreme object of virtuous love and regard.—But an unhappy ſcheme of imaginations, partly prevailed over his judgment, and the truer taſte of his heart, when he was writing his diſſertation upon virtue.

I am not obliged to account for this.—However, I ſuppoſe this aroſe *partly* from ſome diſtreſs his reaſoning powers were thrown into by ſome reaſonings and objections he had met with. Perhaps he did not ſee any other way to reconcile the admiſſion of a moral ſenſe or taſte, in natural men, in ſuch a latitude as he ſee himſelf obliged to admit it, with their being wholly deſtitute of, and dead to all true virtue, and enemies to it, in heart, but by removing virtue away, quite out of the view of the moral faculty, and placing its eſſence in what the moral taſte has no ſenſe of, or reliſh for; and reducing thoſe moral qualities, which it confeſſedly has an approving and pleaſed taſte of, into the low rank and order of material beauties. Some things which he has droped, here and there, I think, render it probable that this was the caſe. He ſays,' (p. 179.) 'Approbation of conſcience is 'the more readily miſtaken for a truly virtuous approbation, becauſe— it agrees with the latter as the ob-

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'ject approved.'---But he need not to have changed the nature of virtue, to have ſecured this tree of life from the rude approach of the wicked. The law of ſin in their members, which wars againſt the law of the mind, does too effectually reſtrain them from being truly virtuous, without the neceſſity of removing virtue out of the view of the law of the mind, and ſetting up being ſimply conſidered, as virtue's firſt and grand object.

It was manifeſtly ſuch a kind of diſtreſs, ariſing from another quarter, that induced this great man, in the latter part of his anſwer to Dr. Taylor, after he had overthrown his ſcheme, to admit, by way of anſwer to ſome of the Doctor's objections againſt the Calviniſtic doctrine, the extravagantly abſurd notions of Adam and all his ſeed being *one* complex, *moral perſon*, or *moral whole*, and of *perſonal identity* being a purely *arbitrary* thing, not at all founded in a phiſical oneneſs, or ſameneſs of being; whereby he has really given up the orthodox doctrine of a proper imputation of Adam's ſin to his poſterity, as a public or family ſin, as being the ſin of their family head; and expoſed the doctrine of orginal ſin, inſtead of defending it; and has betrayed the very foundation of God's moral government, and changed it into the abſurdeſt thing that can be imagined; ſo far as a doctrinal miſrepreſentation of things can do it.

Perhaps from ſome ſuch cauſe Mr. Edwards was determined to adopt that ſcheme of tho'ts concerning moral liberty and neceſſity, as diſtinguiſhed from natural, which is opened in his treatiſe concerning the will. But be the cauſe what it will, he has certainly erred greatly in all theſe things, and very dangerouſly for his followers, as is evident from the nature and tendency of his notions, and from the deſtructive ſcheme of doctrines they are building upon them; which can't be reduced to practice without confounding the churches, and true religion with them.---The grand view manifeſtly was to give a new ſupport to Calviniſm, and overthrow Arminianiſm. Theſe new notions concerning virtue, original ſin,

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and moral liberty and neceſſity, do indeed overthrow Arminianiſm, and genuine Calviniſm too, and together with them, the moral government of God, and confound & change the nature of virtue and vice; ſo far as any ſpeculative doctrines can produce ſuch effects. This worthy good man did not ſee this fatal tendency of theſe ſpeculations: If he had, he would have renounced them with abhorrence.

Great men, when they err in any great matters, err *like themſelves.* They are great in their falls; how much greater when they ſtand firm, and erect, on ſacred ground.

This great, good mind, *now* ſees the whole truth in a perfect, & moſt conſiſtent light, and, no doubt, rejoices in it, with all the children of light, and has obtained plenary pardon of all the unhappy miſtakes which he was ſubject to, in the ſtate of mortality, where the vail is not wholly taken away; and a moſt gracious acceptance with the *Father of lights*, thro' the kind mediation of our great High-Prieſt. And we have, all of us, more and greater errors, in this imperfect ſtate, than we are aware of, or can ever hope to have pardoned to us, but thro' our Lord's merciful interceſſion for us.---Let us not be high-minded, but fear, and look well to our goings: Be honeſt, unbiaſed, and impartial as poſſible, in our reaſonings and religious inquiries; bear with each others weakneſſes, ſpeak the truth in love, honor the great and good, but be careful that our veneration of them prove not a ſnare to us, but always keep our ears open to our true Maſter, and ſure guide: and the reſt he will ſet in order, when he comes. Amen.

CHAP. V.

Of the eſſential nature of true virtue.

MOral virtue (or holineſs) in the moſt comprehenſive ſenſe of the words, includes all that is morally good and right in moral beings, and, as ſuch, worthy of approbation, praiſe and reward.

Virtue is a complex thing: It does not primarily conſiſt in one ſingle diſpoſition, tendency, or affection of the mind,

mind, all other virtuous affections arising out of that as their root; but includes various affections equally original and essential to virtue, and others that are secondary. These are all perfectly harmonious. Their result is honor and happiness.

Virtue has its seat in the mind: not in the understanding only, nor in the will only. Both must concur in the exercises that are truly virtuous. The mind, as intelligent, sees the things that are virtuous, and approves them as morally right and worthy to be chosen, in preference to every thing inconsistent therewith. But altho' the mind sees and approves the things that are virtuous and excellent, yet if this mental approbation is not followed and crowned by a free and determined choice of them, by the heart, but any inconsistent affections prevail, and determine the mind to act contrary to its own moral sense of what is right, the mind is not virtuous but vicious. This is the character of all willful sinners, or wicked men.---On the other hand, the virtuous tendency or propensity of the heart does not consist in any blind instinct, either natural or supernatural; but the mind in all its virtuous propensities and exercises acts with understanding, under the sweet influence of light. But let us observe more particularly.

1st. As God is the first and greatest Being, from whom all others derive their being and their all, virtue or holiness, is in him as its source and original. He is essentially, absolutely and independently virtuous and holy. He has in himself all possible mental powers and perfections; his understanding and power are infinite. All his works are known to him from the beginning. He forefees all future beings and things with equal clearness, as if they stood in present existence before his eye. He thus sees all his creatures, in all their various ranks and orders, and infinitely various capacities and characters, natural and moral, and views them in all their relations to himself, and in their relations to, and connections with each other; and sees what dispositions, actions and con-

duct, in himself to them all, and in them severally towards him, and to one another, are answerable and equitably adapted to his character and to theirs, and to all the various relations between him and them, and among themselves, and the happy tendency and result of such a universally equitable and right conduct, and the wrongness and evil nature and miserable consequences of the contrary.—And as God sees all these things in a perfect light, so he fully and absolutely approves the equitable, and good, and abhors the contrary; and ever determines his own actions and treatment of his creatures, agreably to this moral sense of his own mind; and he wills and commands that his rational creatures should govern themselves by a regard to what is equitable, and morally fit and right, in their whole moral conduct. Those that do so, he approves; those that act in a contrary manner, he blames; and will bless the one and punish the other, unless they repent and amend.—As his moral discernment and taste, or mental approbation of moral good, can't be corrupted or imposed on, so 'tis impossible that his heart or will should be perverted and drawn into the least inconsistence with his sense of what is fit and right; for he can have no motive to be thus inconsistent with himself, and do what his own mind, as intelligent and moral, does necessarily, absolutely and uniformly disapprove and condemn as evil and hateful, in its nature, tendency and consequences. 'God is light, and in him 'is no darkness at all, a God of truth, without iniquity, 'just and right is he.—God cannot be tempted with 'evil, neither tempteth he any man.'

If God is thus perfectly wise and holy, and equitable, or virtuous, it hence follows, that it is the 'good pleasure 'his will' to give his family of rational creatures as great measure of happiness as can be communicated by the exercise of a paternal government over them, perfectly wise, and perfectly virtuous or holy, and *no more*.---Indeed more can't be communicated. An attempt to give more, would defeat its own design, and, in the issue, destroy

ſtroy the happineſs of his children, inſtead of increaſing it.——Goodneſs in God is the goodneſs of a mind abſolutely virtuous and perfectly intelligent. It is then a moſt virtuous propenſity to do what becomes the holy Father of Spirits to do, in forming his offspring to an eſtabliſhed virtuouſneſs of character, in conformity to himſelf; and it further implies a will to render ſuch happy, and a pleaſure in making, and ſeeing them ſo: But it can't will to make the vicious happy: This is abhorrent to virtuous goodneſs or love.--If any are fallen from virtue, virtuous goodneſs will diſpoſe the Father of Spirits to uſe proper methods to recover them to virtue, & ſo, in conſequence, to happineſs, if the circumſtances of their caſe are ſuch, as to render it wiſe and fit to extend ſuch kind care to them. But if not, their caſe is deſperate, and they are *caſt away*, as no longer objects of virtuous goodneſs and care. This is the condition of apoſtate angels; the former, that of mankind as fallen in Adam.

2. Let us next conſider the nature of true virtue as it is in ſubordinate intelligent beings, the offspring of God. In general, it conſiſts in right and equitable diſpoſitions and actions towards God and our fellow ſervants. And thoſe are right and equitable which are anſwerable to, and harmoniouſly agree with their reſpective characters, actions, and relations to us, and to one another.

Our Lord ſums up the whole under two general heads, viz. Supreme love to God, and equitable love to our neighbour. As virtue in all orders of intelligent creatures is eſſentially the ſame, this is a juſt ſummary of it, in regard to them all. Let us then conſider virtue, both as it reſpects God and our neighbour.

1ſt. As it reſpects God, it ſummarily conſiſts in our loving him with all our heart, i. e. with ſupreme, ruling, pious affection and regard. In *this true* virtue *primarily*, *radically*, and *moſt eſſentially* conſiſts. This ſupreme love to God is doubtleſs to be underſtood in a comprehenſive ſenſe, as including that complex affection and pious regard

gard to him which is anſwerable to his whole revealed character, and ſeveral relations to us. God, conſidered in himſelf, and in his relations to us, is moſt worthy of our higheſt fear and love, truſt and confidence, of our whole ſervice and intire obedience, and to be regarded, ſought, and delighted in as the chief good and laſt end of all things. Theſe are eſſential parts of godlineſs, or virtuouſneſs of heart towards God, and are to be underſtood as comprehended in this firſt and great command, 'Thou ſhalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart,' &c:

Theſe right and pious diſpoſitions and exerciſes of the mind towards God, are the reſult of a *true* knowledge, and *realizing* ſenſe of God in the mind, as clothed with his true characters and relations to us; which is given by God himſelf, by the miniſtry of Jeſus Chriſt, and thro' the influence of the Holy Ghoſt. Some writers indeed aſſert, that there muſt firſt be wro't, by the miraculous creating power of the ſpirit, a moral change; (as they deſcribe it, it is a phiſical change) or that a new heart, or virtuous taſte, and ſpiritual ſenſe muſt be created, before any poſſible inlightening of the mind in the knowledge of God can have any influence in exciting and drawing forth any right affections and exerciſes of the heart towards him. This they ſeem to conſider as a ſort of ſubſtratum and ſupport to all the acts and exerciſes of virtue. But they ought to have reflected, that God himſelf, is the ſource and ſupport of virtue in us; which is the re-action of our minds towards him, anſwering to his action and influence on them, by the light and moral power of his glory and love; or their attraction and active tendency towards him, in conſequence of their being brought under the attractive influence of his bleſſed character and gracious love to us in Jeſus Chriſt. Our Lord uſes a ſimilar manner of expreſſion when he ſpeaks of his Father's drawing men, and their coming to him in conſequence thereof; which drawing he makes to conſiſt in God's ſo teaching them as that they hear and learn of him. Again he ſays, 'If I be lifted up from

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'the earth, I will *draw* all men unto me,' 'Tis by the doctrine of his croſs that the attracting glory and love of God and Jeſus Chriſt are moſt clearly manifeſted: And all who behold and realize this glory of the Lord, are drawn by its influence and come to him, and are changed.

To talk of a moral change in the mind, forming the heart in a virtuous temper, as preceeding this attraction of God upon the mind, and as neceſſary to render that effectual, is the ſame abſurdity in divinity or moral philoſophy as it would be in natural, to aſſert that a body naturally cold, muſt firſt change its nature, and become of a hot nature, like the ſun, before it can be warmed by the action of the ſun's rays upon it, however near the ſun may approach towards it.

Moreover, let it be obſerved that God, conſidered by the mind in his *relative* characters, and abſolute perfections, or as exerciſing his perfections in all his relations & works to his creatures, is the complete object of pious regard; which regard is anſwerable to the characters & various relations in which he is ſeen by the believing mind: And in this anſwerableneſs, and harmonious agreement of the affections and actions of the mind to his characters, relations and works, their virtuouſneſs, or moral excellence and acceptableneſs *eſſentially* conſiſts. This is the view which is given us of this matter thro'out the inſpired writings.---It is very ſurpriſing to hear great and good men repreſent all relative duties which we owe to God, and Jeſus Chriſt, conſidered as performed from a regard to their relative characters and works, and to the equitableneſs and ſuitableneſs of ſuch returns, as beauties of an inferior kind, and as having nothing of true virtuouſneſs and moral excellence in them, 'conſi-'dered ſimply, and by themſelves' but only as they ariſe out of, and are the various exerciſes of pure benevolence to Being in general, *ſimply conſidered*, as intelligent.—Such miſrepreſentations and the doctrines built upon them, extremely diſguſt inlightened and virtuous men, and perplex

plex the ſimple, and confound their underſtanding, and involve practical religion (the plaineſt thing in the world, adapted to the capacities of the vulgar) in a cloud, and give it ſo myſterious an appearance, that they are tempted to ſuſpect there is nothing real in it, or if there is, that it is ſo far removed out of their view, that 'tis in vain to trouble themſelves about it. How ſorely is virtue wounded in the houſe of its friends!

2dly. Virtue, as it reſpects our neighbour, ſummarily conſiſts in loving him *as ourſelves.* Which implies that there is a love of ourſelves, which is virtuous, and approved by God: otherwiſe our loving our neighbour as ourſelves could not be a virtuous love.---This virtuous love of our neighbour is explained by our Lord as implying ſuch an equitable affection or diſpoſition of mind towards him, as engages us to do to him all things whatſoever we would, that he ſhould do to us, or could in reaſon and equity expect him to do, if we were in his circumſtances and he in ours.

This virtuous and equitable regard to ourſelves and to our neighbour, is the reſult of a true knowledge or faith of God, as graciouſly revealed to us, and a truly pious and filial regard to him, viewed in his true character, and relations to ourſelves and to our neighbour. Or in other words, this equitable love is the offſpring of piety to God.—Without a true knowledge of God, and our relations to him, we can't truly know ourſelves, or our neighbour; and in conſequence can't know what manner and meaſure of love and regard to him, and to ourſelves is equitable, and agreeable to the righteous will of God: And without a true, pious, governing love and regard to God, our love and reſpect to ourſelves and our neighbour, will neceſſarily be ungoverned, and in a great meaſure irregular, and in many of its exerciſes, in many reſpects, inequitable, or unrighteous; and therefore vicious and blameworthy, *ſo far as inequitable.*

The truly virtuous mind views himſelf, and his neighbour, as God's creatures, ſubjects of his government, & objects

objects of his good-will, and paternal care; who ſeeks their true good, virtue and happineſs; and reflects that it is the good pleaſure of his will that he, and every one do ſo too, in humble dependence on him, the great Father of Love, and fountain of good.—In this view, conformably to God's will, he bears a true, friendly, equitable regard to himſelf, and his neighbour, and endeavours, according to his ability, to promote his own, and his neighbour's good; ſubordinate to God, and to advance himſelf, and his fellow ſervants in virtue, preparative to true happineſs; with humble prayer to the Great Father of the whole family in heaven and earth, to bleſs both them and himſelf, for his own goodneſs ſake, in Jeſus Chriſt.—This ſpirit of equitable, friendly regard, will diſpoſe the virtuous mind to behave to every one in a manner ſuitable to their various characters, offices, and relations, agreably, and in obedience to God's righteous law; which is written in the heart of the truly virtuous.

The love of our neighbour, yea, of any individual, as ſpringing out of theſe principles of faith and pious regard to God, is, in effect, *univerſal* love. For theſe principles will extend this ſpirit of equitable, friendly regard to the whole family of God, to all his creatures, who are objects of his kind care and paternal good-will, when the mind is ſo opened and enlarged, as to take into its view, his whole family as being ſuch, and objects of his benevolent regard.—In this way it is that virtuous love or benevolence becomes general, and extends to all: not from its beginning in pure benevolence to being ſimply conſidered, and ſo from this root, branching out in benevolent regard to particular beings, to God and his intelligent creatures, as ſharers in being, the firſt beloved; Which is an unnatural and unchriſtian notion, and has no countenance from ſcripture, reaſon or experience, but is condemned by them all. How far the idea of virtue given in this chapter is approved and ſuggeſted by inſpired teachers, the reader muſt judge for himſelf.

CHAP. VI.

CHAP. VI.

Of that defective ſort of virtue which is obſervable in many men, who are not truly religious, but, upon the whole, are of a vicious character.

'TIS undeniably true in fact, that natural conſcience and the moral ſenſe have a very conſiderable influence in many men, who are not truly religious, in reſtraining them from many ſins, and engaging them to practiſe many duties: Their hearts, in many inſtances, concur, in ſome degree, with the moral ſenſe of their minds. A ſenſe of equity, of moral honour, of gratitude, a ſpirit of benevolence, compaſſion, &c. and ſome kind of regard to God, influence them to do many worthy deeds, worthy *in ſome reſpects*, and in many leſſer inſtances to deny and controul particular evil diſpoſitions, for their ſakes, when yet they will deny and counteract all theſe for ſome other luſts, and under greater temptations, and have no effectually governing regard to God, and to virtue, its intereſts and reward.

Writers are divided in their ſentiments concerning actions of this kind. Some are diſpoſed to allow them to be virtuous in ſome degree. Others ſay there is nothing in them that does at all partake of the nature of true virtue. This is Mr. Edwards's ſentiment. Some others go farther, and ſay, they are perfect ſins, and, as ſome expreſs themſelves, abominable good works. Mr. Hopkins ſays, '*all* the exerciſes of the hearts of the unregenerate; (even the beſt of them, under the higheſt influences of common grace, and ſtrivings of the Holy Spirit) 'are in *direct oppoſition* to God, his ſpirit and law.'* I believe this ſubject, which is often handled in a very confuſed manner, may be ſet in a juſt and clear light. Whether it is ſo repreſented here, the reader will judge, when he has run thro' this chapter.

A diſtinction ought to be made between the denominating character of the agent, and that of particular actions which he does. Theſe do not always agree. Both virtuous

* Sermon on John 1. 13. p. 39.

virtuous and vicious men are generally imperfect in their reſpective characters in this life; and ſome are ſo in a very great degree, eſpecially in the morning of their moral life, and are in a great degree inconſiſtent with themſelves, in their diſpoſitions and conduct. Some particular actions, in both, are governed by, and denominated from the weaker principles and ſprings of action, in them, and are inconſiſtent with, and belie their true, prevailing, denominating characters: If we judge of their reſpective characters by them, we ſhall judge wrong. Truly virtuous or good men, ſometimes (alaſs! too frequently) do particular actions which are morally evil, *wholly* evil: the virtuous principles and tempers which habitually rule in them, have no degree of influence in producing them, but are quieſcent, or over-ruled by contrary principles or paſſions. In theſe things they act wholly out of character, conſidered as virtuous; and yet they act from an inward ſpring in themſelves. Thus, for example, Peter was a believing and good man, but his denying his Lord was a very evil thing, had not the leaſt tincture of faith or virtue in it, but ſprang wholly out of ſinful fear and criminal cowardice, which at that time ſuppreſſed the actings of his faith, and virtuous love to his Maſter. If this had been his habitually ruling principle, he would not have been a good or virtuous man, any more than thoſe jewiſh rulers who believed that Jeſus was the Chriſt, but did not confeſs him, leſt they ſhould be put out of the ſynagogue, becauſe they loved the praiſe of men, more than the praiſe of God. So, on the other hand, men of a vicious character do ſome particular actions which do not ſpring from any vicious principles or affections in their hearts, and have no *poſitive* viciouſneſs in them.

I do not mean to inſinuate that they ſpring from any *truly* virtuous principles of heart. They have no ſuch principles of action in their hearts.---But there are certain middle principles or ſprings of action wro't into the mind of man, by our gracious Creator, which, tho' they

are not virtuous, and do not neceſſarily imply a principle of virtue in the heart, yet are friendly to virtue, and eſpouſe its cauſe within us, ſuppoſe the mind duely inſtructed: Such are reaſon, natural conſcience, the moral ſenſe or taſte, &c. Theſe have ſome degree of influence, in many natural men. In ſome ſingle actions they rule. Thus, for inſtance, men, whoſe hearts are far from being in an habitual, and univerſally equitable diſpoſition towards God and their neighbour, are many times determined to do particular equitable actions to others from a regard to the equity of the caſe, as their true ſpring; and, for equity's ſake, deny themſelves in little things.—What is poſitive in ſuch actions is not ſinful or vicious; it is contrary to no law of God, but required in the law. But there is an eſſential defect in the agent, which renders him not well accepted: Yet he is not blamed, ſtricly ſpeaking, for what he does, but for what is wanting to render his work perfect, or truly virtuous. What I intend will, perhaps, be beſt illuſtrated in this manner. God commands his people to deal equitably, every man with his neighbour, from a regard to what is juſt, and out of a ſupreme reſpect and duty to him, their righteous Father and Judge, who loves righteouſneſs, and hates iniquity. Now A. in dealing with B. his neighbour, ſees what is right between them, and, from a regard to the equity of the caſe, deals juſtly with him, when at the ſame time he ſees how he might make an unrighteous gain by him, undiſcovered: But in all this he has no true and obedient regard to God as his righteous Governor and Judge. (There are many ſuch caſes in real life.) The action he does is a right action, in reſpect to what is poſitive in it, commanded by God, and the motive on which he acts is a right motive, one of the motives God wills him to be influenced by. There is therefore nothing evil in the action, *poſitively* conſidered, nor in the motive upon which it is done: but the man is blame-worthy in that he is not influeneed by a religious regard to God, as well as by a regard to the equity

quity of the caſe, in reſpect to his neighbour. In this regard his action is *eſſentially deficient*, and weighed in a true balance is found light, and can't be accepted as an inſtance of true, divine virtue.

To render actions truly virtuous, they muſt be ſanctified by a ſpirit of religious regard to God, mingling it ſelf in with them. This is the true ſalt which ſeaſons, and fits them to be offered to God as an acceptable ſacrifice, by Jeſus Chriſt.—If actions of the kind above ſpecified, unſeaſoned with ſalt, are at all conſidered as virtues, it muſt be in an improper ſenſe. If any are diſpoſed to conſider them as branches of virtue, they ſhould repreſent them as *dead branches* which have no vital union with the true root of the tree, viz. a ſpirit of religious regard to God. As ſuch they will ſoon wither away, if not grafted upon the true ſtock; like the faith of the ſtony ground hearers, who have *no root in themſelves*.—Yet, on the other hand, men act very unadviſedly in reviling this kind of deficient actions, as having nothing in their nature but what is ſin, and an abomination to God. There is ſomething in them which is right, as we have ſeen, and required by God. This is approved, not abhorred and thrown back as dung in the faces of the doers of them: ‡ Yet the agent is faulted for that which is wanting in his work to render it truly holy, and accepted, as having all the eſſential characters of truly good fruit.—This kind of actions which are not poſitively vicious, nor yet truly virtuous, may fitly be reſembled to what is called hiſtorical faith; which implies aſſent to the truth of the goſpel facts, founded on the proper evidence (which ſaving faith alſo has) but the heart does not embrace the truths believed with governing love; and therefore

‡ God, ſpeaking to his people concerning their late covenant, to releaſe their ſervants, and actually ſending them out free, for a ſhort time, tho' they ſoon repented of this good deed, and brought them into bondage again, ſays, 'Ye were now turned, and had *done right in my ſight*, in proclaiming liberty every man to his neighbour.' Jerm. 34. 15.

therefore the faith is not saving. For '*with the heart* man believeth unto righteousness.' Yet the assent of the mind is not sinful. 'Thou believest there is one God: Thou *dost well*' says the apostle James. But lest men should rest here, he adds, 'Devils also believe and tremble.'

Actions *materially* good, may be distinguished into three kinds; the first are *formally* good, and truly virtuous and holy, acceptable and rewardable, upon the gospel plan of grace.—The second kind are such as have been mentioned above. Of this sort the commendable behaviour of the young man in the gospel was, whom our gracious Lord looked upon with love; but added, *one thing thou lackest yet.* May all his ministers learn of him.—The third sort are such *materially* good actions as spring from vicious motives and lusts of the heart. Such were the public prayers, fastings and alms of the Pharisees. These are *positively* vicious: the outward work is rendered unclean, profane and abominable by the vicious principle of the heart from which it proceeds.

When all the reformations and best moral actions of natural men, under the influence of an awakened and inlightened conscience, and the highest improvements of common grace, are represented as altogether vicious, and in direct opposition to the spirit and law of God, and abominable to him, like the Pharisees prayers and alms; they are set in a very false light, and a stumbling block is cast before the lame and the blind. A thing which their appointed *guides* ought not to do.

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